

TABLE 1

REPRODUCTIVE SUCCESS OF BAYBACKED SHRIKE AT
NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK

Year	No. of eggs laid in 4 nests	No. of hatched young that fledged in 4 nests	Reproduc- tive success in %	No. fledg- ed young per pair
1982	12	4	33.33	1.00
1983	14	6	42.85	1.50
	26	10	39.15	1.2

NATIONAL ZOOLOGICAL PARK,
NEW DELHI 110 003,
January 16, 1985.

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REFERENCE

ALI, S. & RIPLEY, S. D. (1968): The Handbook
of the birds of India and Pakistan. Vol. 5. pp. 85-86.

11. A RE-ASSIGNMENT OF TWO SMALL BABBLERS AT PRESENT
IN THE GENUS *YUHINA*

(With a text-figure)

Typical species of the genus *Yuhina* have long bills with basal ends of even thickness, straight lower mandibles, and tapering, down-curved upper mandibles. Crown feathers are elongated and tapering. The tail is moderately long, square-ended and uniformly coloured. Two species previously constituting the genus *Ixulus*, now assigned to *Yuhina*, have shorter, stouter bills of similar type and short blunt crests, but are otherwise similar. They may show the more generalised form of characters of the latter genus. Two species appear to be wrongly assigned to *Yuhina*. *Y. zantholeuca* has green plumage, a shorter crest, and a deep-based tapering bill typical of the genus *Stachyris*, to which it is proposed to re-assign it. *Y. castaniceps* has a bill in which upper and

During two breeding season a total of 8 nests were marked for studying the reproductive success. A total of 26 eggs were laid in these eight nests, out of which 18 (69.2%) hatched. Out of 18 young 8 died due to predation & accidental falls from the nest. The reproductive success was the 39.15% or 1.2 chicks per nest during the study (Table 1).

lower mandible both curve to a blunt tip, a very brief crest, and a strongly graduated, white-tipped tail. It does not appear obviously related to this or other genera, and it is proposed to re-assign it to its original monotypic genus as *Staphida castaniceps*.

INTRODUCTION

During a recent study of the Babblers, Timaliidae, an examination of the small babblers of the genus *Yuhina* brought to my attention some apparent errors in the taxonomic grouping of these birds. In the past, and even in current taxonomy the family contains an unusually large number of small or monotypic genera, indicating a high degree of

morphological diversity and specialisation, and possibly an origin or radiation earlier than those of similar but more uniform taxa. Speciation has been particularly complex in south-east Asia and it has produced a number of basically similar small species, some of which have been brought into the genus *Yuhina* Hodgson 1836.

In part this follows a claim during the last few decades that too many and too small bird taxa were recognised, particularly at generic level. This was followed by a general policy of "lumping" to produce larger units. A distinct character of such lumping was an apparent determination to eliminate very small or monotypic genera, to a point where it sometimes became irrational.

The point at which taxa are joined to form larger groupings within a classification is a subjective choice of the classifier; but if a classification is to be useful and meaningful there is a need for consistency in criteria and arrangement at each level in the hierarchy. The application of this at the generic level will always lead to species being grouped into genera of varying size on the basis of apparent evolutionary origin from a single ancestral form.

If this arrangement is applied consistently it is likely that in many instances one or more isolated species will be found which do not fit into other generic groupings and which possess a combination of characters which set them apart from the others. These may be forms that have not produced an evolutionary adaptive radiation, or that had other closely related forms which have become extinct, and are therefore the hierarchal equivalents of groups of species. Their present status within a classification is most properly and adequately expressed by treating them as monotypic

genera. However, the tendency has been to search for a genus already containing a number of species, to which they have some resemblance, and to merge them into that genus.

In *Yuhina* there appear to be two subgenera, previously both genera, that have close affinities with each other, but in addition two species have been included the affinities of which appear to lie elsewhere.

THE YUHINAS

There are five typical Yuhinas — the Stripethroated *Yuhina Y. gularis* Hodgson 1836, the Whitecollared *Y. diademata* Verreaux 1869, the Slatyheaded *Y. occipitalis* Hodgson 1836, the Taiwan *Y. brunneiceps* Ogilvie-Grant 1906 and the Blackchinned *Y. nigrimentum* Blyth 1845. They are small birds, with a bill of uniform thickness towards the base, but long and thin with a straight lower mandible and the upper mandible tapering and downcurved towards the tip, and the tip often very slightly decurved (Fig. 1 C). The feathers of the crown are elongated and tapering and form a pointed crest, and the tail is moderately long and square-ended. Although colours of head and crest vary, the rest of the plumage, including the tail, is relatively uniform in colour and in shades of browns and greys.

There was a smaller genus of similar species, *Ixulus* Hodgson 1844. Several of what were regarded as separate species within it have been combined as a single species, the Yellow-naped *Ixulus I. flavicollis* (Hodgson, 1836). The bill is shorter and more blunt than those of typical yuhinas, but shares the same character of a straight lower mandible and an upper mandible tapering and curving towards the tip. The crown feathers are elongated but still broadly rounded at the tip and the crest is

shorter and broader. A second species, the Whitenaped *Ixulus I. bakeri* (Rothschild, 1926) (previously *Siva occipitalis* Blyth 1845) has a still stouter but similar bill (fig. 1 d), and similar crest. Both species show some pale rachial streaking on parts of the plumage, notably face and mantle, but in general character are otherwise similar to *Yuhina* species. *Ixulus* has been combined with *Yuhina* in recent taxonomy; the bill and crest characters being regarded as more generalised stages of those found in species of the latter genus. Taxonomically the seven species appear to form a reasonable unit.

THE RE-ALLOCATED SPECIES

The Whitebellied *Yuhina* or Whitebellied Erpornis *Y. zantholeuca*

The species *Erpornis zantholeuca* Hodgson 1844 constituted a monotypic genus which was, in the past, loosely associated with *Yuhina* and *Ixulus* and in the re-classification of these species has been combined with them as *Y. zantholeuca*. It is uniform olive-green or yellowish-green above and on the head, and pale greyish-white below. The crown feathers are moderately but not markedly elongated and tend to have a darker streak along the rachis. In these respects it differs from *Yuhina* species. It resembles them in general structure, but the bill is different (fig. 1 a).

The bill is dorsoventrally deep at its base, and although there is a very slight curvature of the culmen it tapers fairly evenly to a point, the lower mandible tapering as well. At its tip the upper mandible is slightly decurved, just overlapping that of the lower mandible, but the curvature appears greater, due to the presence of small tomial notches

on either side of the upper mandible just proximal to the tip.

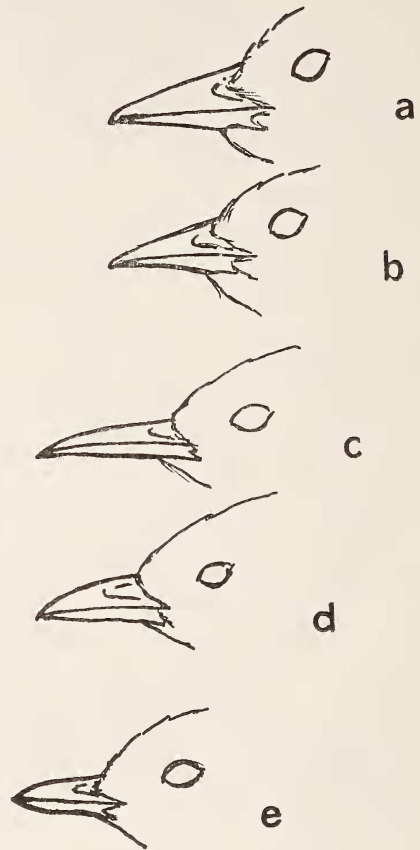


Fig. 1. Bills of — a, *Yuhina (Erpornis) zantholeuca*; b, *Stachyris chrysaea*; c, *Yuhina occipitalis*; d, *Yuhina (Ixulus) bakeri*; e, *Yuhina (Staphida) castaniceps*. approx. $\times 1\frac{1}{2}$.

This deep-based tapering bill sets the species apart from those of the enlarged *Yuhina* genus; but the character is typical of another genus of small babblers — *Stachyris* Hodgson 1844. It is difficult to see how this was overlooked in earlier taxonomic work, apart from the accident of a diversity of basi-

cally similar species and the lack of linear proximity in past arrangements. *Stachyris* is a large genus with twenty-five species, and shows variation in colour and pattern among them. The differences in plumage which set *zantholeuca* apart from *Yuhina* species can be matched in *Stachyris* by those shown by the Goldenheaded Babbler *S. chrysaea*. This is a much smaller species than *zantholeuca*, but with a similar bill. It has a similar geographical range from the Himalayas to Sumatra. It too is olive-green in colour with dark rachial streaking on slightly elongated crown feathers; but the paler underside and the head are suffused with yellow.

On the basis of its morphology I propose to transfer the species originally *Erpornis zantholeuca* Hodgson 1844 from the genus *Yuhina* to *Stachyris*, as the Whitebellied Babbler *S. zantholeuca*.

The Chestnut-eared Babbler *Y. castaniceps*

This species, also known as the Whitebrowed *Yuhina* and Chestnut-headed Staphidia, was originally subdivided into five species and constituted the genus *Staphida* Gould 1871 (also erroneously spelt *Staphidea* and *Staphidia*, see Deignan in Peters (1964)). It was later included in *Yuhina*, although Baker (1922) had pointed out that this was an error.

The species is brown above and white below. The head colour varies in the subspecies from all chestnut, to grey with chestnut ear-coverts, and whitish rachial streaks on head and back, and grey crown with chestnut

ear-coverts and nape, and short whitish streaks on nape and back. The crown feathers are rounded and slightly elongated to form a small blunt crest on most forms. The bill is small and blunt with a slight upward curvature towards the tip on the lower mandible, and a similar downward curvature on the upper mandible. The bill-shape is not like that of *Yuhina* species, and is perhaps more like that of the Titbabblers *Alcippe* species. The tail is strongly graduated and except on the central pair the feathers have large white tips, increasing in size towards the outer pairs.

The pale streaks on feathers of back and face may have invited comparison with *Yuhina (Ixulus) bakeri*, which has the bluntest bill among the *Yuhinas*, and the short crest may have seemed somewhat similar to the shorter crests of what were originally *Ixulus* species. In fact *castaniceps* was originally assigned to the latter genus. However, the different bill-shape, the difference in tail shape and pattern which does not immediately link it with any particular taxon, and the fact that the short crest and some streaking of plumage also occur in other genera of small babblers, justifies the separation of this species from the present genus *Yuhina* which is otherwise consistent in character.

I suggest that it should be retained as the Chestnut-eared Babbler *Staphida castaniceps*, in a monotypic genus.

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November 9, 1984.

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12. THE RUFOUSTAILED FLYCATCHER, *MUSCICAPA RUFICAUDA* IN BHARATPUR, RAJASTHAN

At about 9.30 a.m. on the 28 September 1984, I saw a solitary Rufoustailed flycatcher flying about amongst the foliage of a *Ficus religiosa* tree in the heart of the Keoladeo National Park in Bharatpur. The bird was smaller than a sparrow and superficially quite similar to the Brown flycatcher *Muscicapa latirostris*. It was plain dull brown above with ashy underparts. The eyes were large with a faint white eyering and when I looked at it intently with my 10 x 35 binoculars, I could make out the blackish legs and the flesh coloured lower mandible. Identification was rendered positive due to the presence of a rufous rump and tail which were conspicuous especially in flight.

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The bird was observed for about 20 minutes as it restlessly flitted about the foliage in the upper canopy of the tall tree. It never launched a typical flycatcher-like sally but instead foraged by moving about only within the canopy and boughs.

The flycatcher was obviously on its south bound, autumn passage as the INDIAN HANDBOOK (compact edition, p. 490) says that it breeds in the western Himalayas and winters in the evergreen tracts of south western India. This happens to be the first record of the occurrence of this species at Bharatpur. The "Checklist of the birds of Delhi, Agra and Bharatpur" (Abdulali & Panday 1978) indicates that the species has been dubiously recorded in the Delhi area.

R. KANNAN

13. ON THE IDENTITY OF THE EASTERNMOST RACE OF *PRINIA CRINIGER* (HODGSON) IN INDIAN LIMITS

In 1924 Stuart Baker described *Suya* (now *Prinia*) *criniger assamica* from Shillong, Assam, and said the distribution was south and east of the Brahmaputra, and in the Chin Hills. It was said to be much darker brown than *criniger* Hodgson, the nominate form

from Nepal and *striatula* (Hume, Karachi) from the west, almost as dark as *yunnanensis* and to have the head boldly streaked, even in the breeding plumage.

Deignan, 1942 accepted all three races from India, without comment, and followed them